

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

(SNIE) ON PANAMA

REF: STATE 071284

1. IF A PANAMA CANAL TREATY IS SIGNED AND BOTH SIDES BEGIN THE RATIFICATION PROCESS, THE GOVERNMENT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (GOTT) WOULD STRONGLY FAVOR RATIFICATION. AS LONG AS THE RATIFICATION PROCESS APPEARS TO BE GOING RELATIVELY SMOOTHLY, HOWEVER, WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE ANY DIRECT ACTIONS OR PRESSURES WOULD BE INITIATED BY THE GOTT TO PROMOTE RATIFICATION.

2. ALTHOUGH ONLY 8 PERCENT OF TRINIDAD'S MERCHANDISE IMPORTS PASS THROUGH THE CANAL, A MUCH HIGHER PROPORTION OF SHIPPING RELATED TO IMPORT OF CRUDE OIL AND EXPORT OF REFINED PETROLEUM PRODUCTS TRANSITS THE PANAMA CANAL. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO IS THEREFORE CLASSIFIABLE AS ONE OF THESE STATES WHOSE ECONOMY IS SIGNIFICANTLY DEPENDENT UPON KEEPING THE CANAL OPEN. ANY ARGUMENT THAT THIS COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED ONLY BE CONTINUATION OF VIRTUAL US SOVEREIGNTY OVER A CANAL ZONE, HOWEVER, WOULD BE STRONGLY REJECTED BY THE GOTT AND INTERPRETED AS AN INSULTING AND IMPERIALISTIC THESIS.

3. IF THE US SENATE FAILS TO RATIFY A NEGOTIATED TREATY

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OR NEGOTIATIONS BREAK DOWN, THE OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL

REACTION IN TRINIDAD AGAINST THE USG WOULD BE SHARP AND BITTER. GOTT OFFICIALS ARE CLOSELY FOLLOWING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE USG PLEDGE TO WORK OUT A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH PANAMA COMPATIBLE WITH THE TIMES. A BREAKDOWN IN NEGOTIATIONS OR FAILURE TO RATIFY, WHICH PRESUMABLY COULD OCCUR IN MID OR LATE 1975, WOULD COINCIDE WITH PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGNING IN TRINIDAD. IN THE HEIGHTENED POLITICAL DEBATE OF A NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE IN ANY CASE WILL BE THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES-BASED MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS IN TRINIDAD'S ECONOMY. IF APPARENT USG RECALCITRANCE ON THE PANAMA CANAL ISSUE IS INJECTED INTO THIS MATRIX IT WILL SIGNIFICANTLY STRENGTHEN THE CONVICTIONS AND INFLUENCE OF THOSE CALLING FOR TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO REJECT A PATH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BASED ON COOPERATION WITH US MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS. DEMANDS FOR TAKEOVER OF EXISTING US INVESTMENTS WOULD BE REINFORCED. THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF WOULD BE LIKELY TO TAKE SOME MOVES HOSTILE TO US INTERESTS HERE IN SUCH A CHARGED POLITICAL CONTEXT, FOR THE GOTT WOULD VIEW A PANAMA CANAL IMPASSE AS A MAJOR DEFAULT ON US PLEDGES TO BE RESPONSIVE TO REAL GRIEVANCES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, AND AN INDICATION OF A BASIC TURNING AWAY FROM THE PROMISES AND GOALS OF THE NEW DIALOGUE. AT THE BEST, OUR EFFORTS TO TRY TO DEAL MORE EFFECTIVELY ON BILATERAL PROBLEMS WOULD BE JEOPARDIZED BY A HARDENING OF THE GOTT SOLIDARITY WITH THE THIRD WORLD IN A CONFRONTATIONAL STANCE "AGAINST" THE UNITED STATES.

4. GOTT LEADERS KNOW THE PANAMA CANAL ISSUE IS NOT AN EASY ONE FOR THE USG. PERHAPS FOR THIS VERY REASON IT IS VIEWED AS A KEY INDICATOR OF WHETHER WE REALLY DO MEAN IT WHEN WE SAY WE INTEND TO WORK TOGETHER IN A NEW AND MORE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP RESPECTING THE CHANGED INTERNATIONAL REALITIES OF THE LAST QUARTER OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, OR WHETHER WE WILL REVERT TO THE BIG STICK AND ESSENTIALLY REPRESENT FOR THEM A POWERFUL BUT REACTIONARY FORCE WHICH MUST BE OPPOSED AT EVERY TURN.

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5. IN SUMMARY, FAILURE TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON NEGOTIATION AND RATIFICATION OF A NEW PANAMA CANAL TREATY SATISFACTORY TO BOTH SIDES WOULD: A) CREATE DEEP-SEATED DOUBTS HERE ABOUT US INTENTIONS AND GOOD WILL; B) FEED ANTI-US HOSTILITY; C) INJECT ANTI-US THEMES POWERFULLY INTO ELECTION-YEAR CAMPAIGNING; D) CREATE ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS AND JEOPARDY FOR EXISTING AND POTENTIAL

US INVESTMENTS HERE; AND E) MOVE THE GOTT INTO SHARPER OPPOSITION TO US OBJECTIVES IN INTERNATIONAL FORA SUCH AS THE UN AND OAS. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THESE RESULTS WERE MANIFESTED, OF COURSE, WOULD BE AFFECTED BY THE EXTENT AND DEPTH OF THE APPARENT US REJECTION OF A PANAMA CANAL TREATY.

6. WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT US REJECTION WOULD BE HIGHLY VOCAL AND PUBLIC, MODERATING EFFORTS THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS TO TRY TO PORTRAY THE PROBLEMS AS YET SOLUBLE IN DUE COURSE WILL BE A WEAK PALLIATIVE AT BEST. FURTHERMORE, THE GOTT WOULD QUESTION THE GOOD FAITH AND COMPETENCE OF THE USG IN APPARENTLY NEGOTIATING A TREATY WHICH IT HAD NO REALISTIC ASSURANCE IT WOULD BE ALLOWED BY THE SENATE TO RATIFY. IT WOULD BE UNREALISTIC TO ASSUME THAT SUCH USG DIPLOMATIC OR INFORMATIONAL EFFORTS WOULD BE ABLE TO MUFLLE THE MESSAGE WHICH GOTT LEADERS AND POLITICIANS WOULD INTERPRET ABOUT THE REAL MOOD OF AMERICA OR THE ABILITY OF THE USG TO CARRY OUT PLEDGES OF COOPERATION.

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